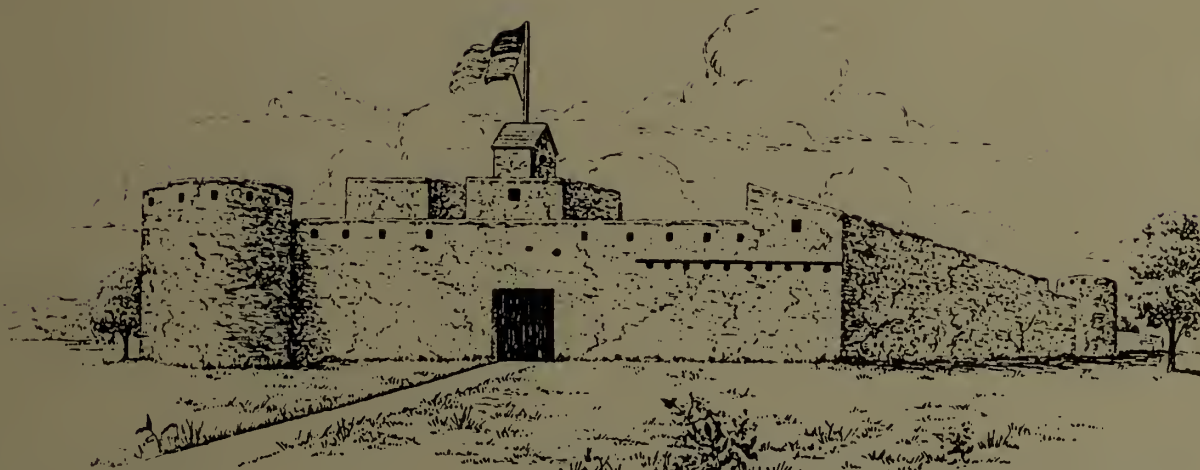


# Bent's Old Fort

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE  
35110 HIGHWAY 194 EAST  
LA JUNTA, CO 81050-9523  
PHONE (719) 384-2596

BEOL  
COPY 2



*Bent's Old Fort - Colorado*

*(From an old sketch by Le Roy Boyd)*

## Statement for Management

September 1990



**STATEMENT FOR MANAGEMENT**  
**BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

**Definition**

The statement for management (SFM) provides an up-to-date inventory of the park's condition and an analysis of its problems. It does not involve any prescriptive decisions on future management and use of the park, but it provides a format for evaluating conditions and identifying major issues and information voids.

Recommended by:

/s/ Donald Hill  
Superintendent,  
Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

7/25/90  
Date


Approved By:

  
Regional Director,  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office

9/12/90  
Date

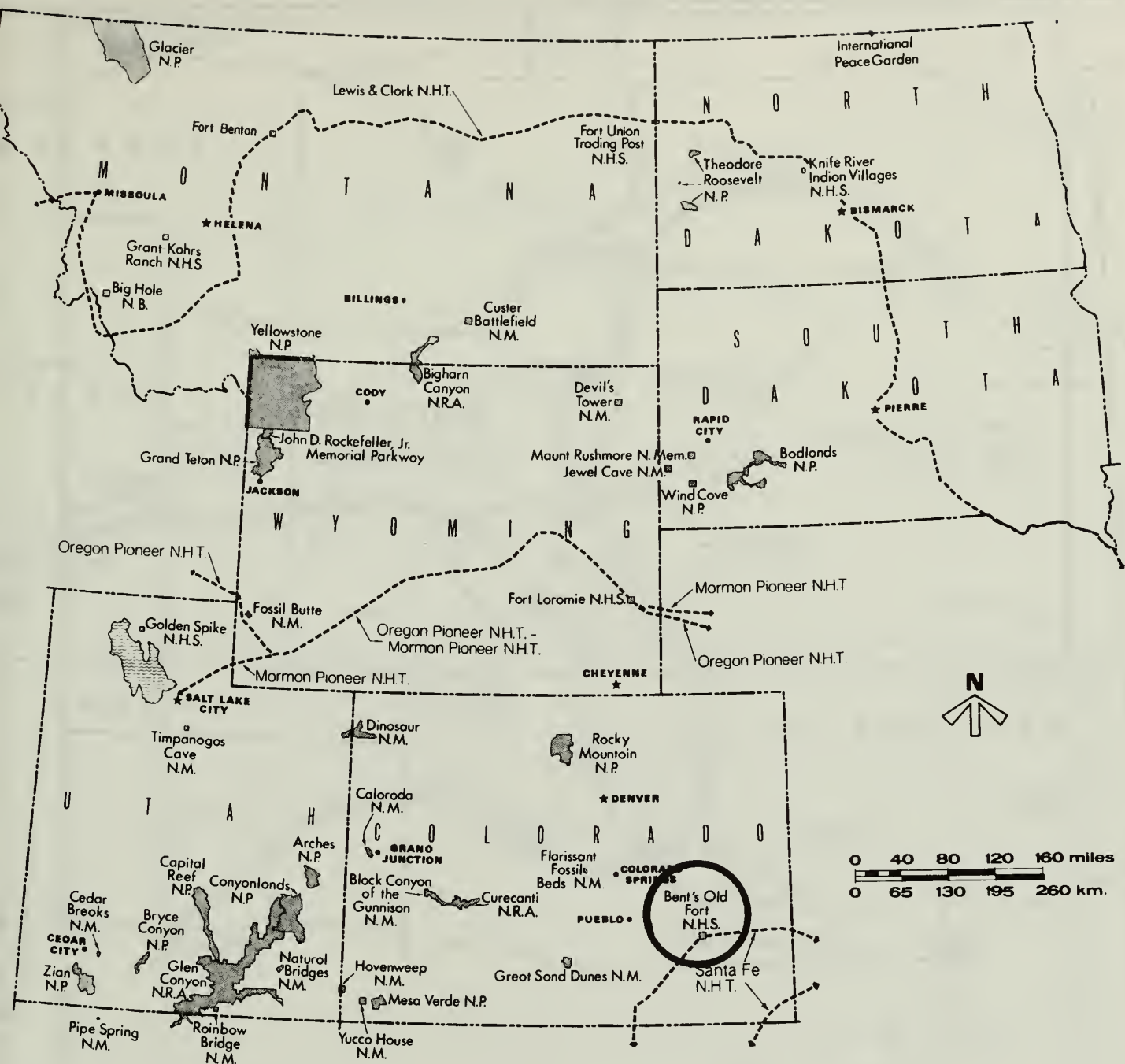
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## Legend

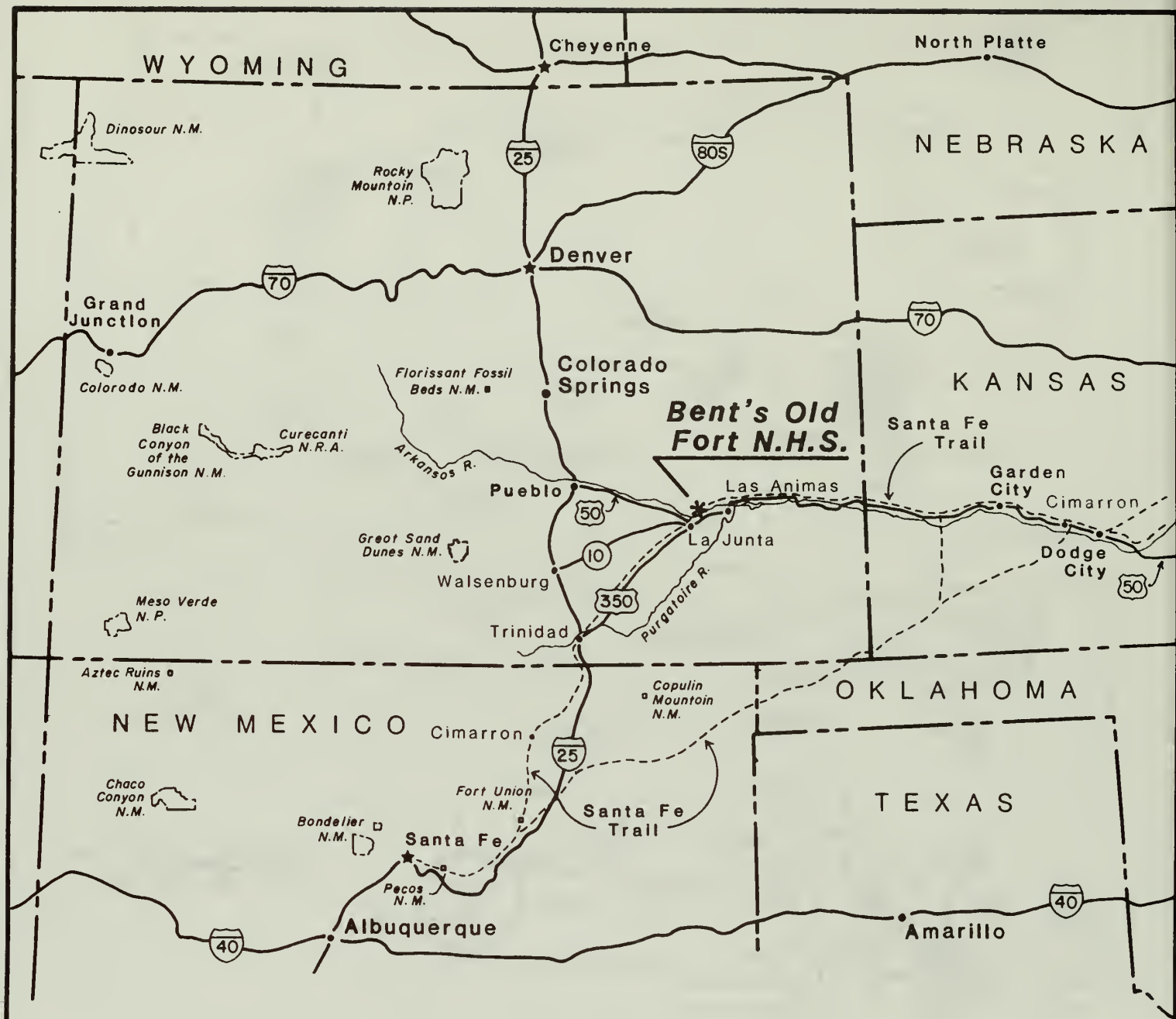
- Locations of Major Cities
- \* Locations of State Capitals
- State Boundary Lines
- National Park Service Areas
- National Park Service Historical Trails

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

National Park Service

United States Department  
of the Interior





**Vicinity Map**  
**Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site**  
**Colorado**  
 U.S. Dept. of the Interior - National Park Service







## **LOCATION**

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site is in southeastern Colorado, on the north side of the Arkansas River, in Otero County 6 miles east of La Junta on State Highway 194. The site is located in the Fourth Congressional District.

## **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Bent's Old Fort's basic purpose is defined in Public Law 86-487 (74 STAT. 155), enacted June 3, 1960, as follows: "for the purpose of establishing a national historic site at the site of Bent's Old Fort on the Santa Fe Trail." The historic site is a public memorial to commemorate the role such a fort played in opening the west. The National Park Service, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, "shall administer, protect and develop such a monument," subject to the Act establishing the National Park Service, August 25, 1916, and the Historic Site Act, August 21, 1935.

The historic site commemorates the Bent, St. Vrain Trading empire, which radiated from Bent's Old Fort into present day Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, Nebraska, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming and Missouri. The post solidified one of the most important and last established trading cartels in the Rocky Mountain west. Established between 1832 and 1835, Bent's Old Fort was an important point of commercial, social, military and cultural contact between Anglo-American, American Indian, Hispanic and various minority cultures on the border of United States Territory. The fort served as a point of exchange for trappers from the southern Rocky Mountains, travelers from Missouri and the east, Hispanic traders from Mexico and Indians, primarily from the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche and Kiowa tribes. In addition, the fort served as a supply depot for U.S. Army Dragoons before and during the 1846 War with Mexico. The fort was abandoned in 1849 by William Bent because of the declining trade, breakup of the partnership, and an outbreak of cholera.

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site is located along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail and interprets the significance of the trail and the impact it had on the economics of the United States and the Republic of Mexico.

The Act of May 8, 1987 (101 STAT. 302 [HR240]), established the Santa Fe National Historic Trail (SFNHT) as part of the National Trail System (see appendix C). The act has bearing on the site as Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site includes archeological remnants of the Santa Fe Trail. The Mountain Branch of the trail was most heavily used during the period of the Mexican War, again during the Civil War and towards the end of the period of trail use, when railroad construction brought and end to the commerce of the prairies.

During the years 1953 to 1976, the site experienced extensive archeological survey and investigation. Two separate collections are maintained that give evidence of environmental condition, human activity and material culture. The importance of these

resources cannot be overstated since these artifacts, coupled with primary written sources, represent the basis of our knowledge of the fort.

## **INFLUENCES: INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

### **LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Existing Factors**

The historic site is a legislative unit of the National Park System. Management is adequate under current legislative mandates.

Provisions affecting the establishment and administration of the historic site are as follows:

Bent's Old Fort NHS establishment authorized by the Act of June 3, 1960, (74 STAT. 155) (appendix A).

The organic act of the National Park Service by the Act of August 25, 1916, (39 STAT 535).

Boundary changes added to the historic site by the Act of November 10, 1978, on the south side of the Arkansas River, for purposes of developing public access to the site from U.S. Highway 50 and for maintaining the historic setting (appendix B).

Designation of the Santa Fe Trail as a National Historic Trail by amending the National Trail System Act, May 8, 1987 (101 STAT. 302), (appendix C).

The Antiquities Act of 1906, (34 STAT. 225), which protects structures or objects of historic, prehistoric or scientific value from appropriation or destruction on public lands.

The Historic Sites Act, August 21, 1935, which provides a "policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States."

National Environmental Policy Act, 1969, which requires consideration of the impacts of developmental or operation projects on the human environment (historic properties included).

Executive Order 11593, Preservation and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment, May 13, 1971, calls for survey to identify and protect historic resources on federal preserves (evaluation of National Register of Historic Places properties).

E.O. 11988, Floodplain Management, protects life and prevents damage to federal property from flooding and preservation of floodplain and wetland values. Maintenance, development and planning at the site are affected.

E.O. 11990, Protection of Wetland Habitats, assists with maintaining the values of the historic setting and the riparian habitat.

National Trails System Act (P.L. 90-543, amended P.L. 100-559), October 29, 1988, which establishes such a system and includes historic trail resources of national importance.

Santa Fe National Historic Trail's Comprehensive Management and Use Plans, Final Draft, October 1989, which identifies the historic site's interface, liaison and site-specific development.

Memorandum of understanding with the Otero County Fire Protection District for structural and wild land fire suppression services, in draft.

Memorandum of understanding with the Otero County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement support services, backup and security alarm response, in draft. The historic site is under concurrent jurisdiction.

Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR, July 1, 1989, provides for the proper use, management, government, and protection of person, property, and natural and cultural resources within the park and the mission described in legislation. These are further defined in the Compendium: Superintendent's Orders dated September 13, 1989. In an attempt to maintain historic authenticity, safety and accountability, the park has established certain regulations regarding the use and possession of alcohol, black powder, and replica or period weapons.

### **Special Use Permits**

<b>Permit No.</b>	<b>Permittee</b>	<b>Code Description</b>	<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>Date Expires</b>
SP1310-2-0001	Robert Wilburn	02 Clvn/Grazing	09/01/87	09/30/92
SP1310-3-0001	Mike Dutton	07 Agric	03/01/83	01/31/93

A cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and Bent's Old Fort Historical Association to use facilities within the park for sale of educational and interpretive items for the benefit of the visiting public, 12/89 (5 years). In addition, there is a memorandum dated 2/9/90, addressing park operational expectations.



Right-of-way for the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railway is parallel to the historic site's southern boundary and covers tracts 01-115, 01-116 and 01-128.

Two 16-foot highway access openings exist on southwest and southeast corners of the historic site boundary. These two openings access U.S. Highway 50 and cross the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railway. The southeast access is Otero County Road 36 and is used to monitor the park land south of the Arkansas River. Access rights were granted to the State of Colorado Department of Highways, and these rights were transferred with the Harmon property purchase 08/09/79.

The federal government owns 47 shares of Fort Lyon Canal Company Water noted in certificates 8104 and 8183, dated 12/12/79 and 09/09/81, respectively.

### **Upcoming Factors**

Special use permits to renegotiate:

<b>Permit No.</b>	<b>Permittee</b>	<b>Code Description</b>	<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>Date Expires</b>
SP1310-3-0001	Mike Dutton	07 Agricultural	03/01/83	01/31/93
SP1310-3-0001	Mountain Bell	06 Underground	06/20/75	06/20/85
SP1310-6-0002	SE Colo Power	06 Electrical Ln	03/17/76	12/01/85

Operational changes in livestock management at the site since SP1310-3-0001 was issued will necessitate a look at agricultural use versus rehabilitated prairie.

SP1310-3-0001 and SP1310-6-0002 for utility lines need to be reissued. The lines should have no negative impact on the site. It may be appropriate to bury telephone lines across the historic site parallel to State Highway 194.

Finalization is needed for a memorandum of understanding between the National Park Service and the Otero County Sheriff, for law enforcement assistance and support. Draft document is under review in the region and with the solicitor. The park is currently working under a previous draft dated 7/11/90.

Finalization is needed for a memorandum of understanding between the National Park Service and La Junta Rural Fire Protection District, for fire suppression assistance and support. Draft document dated 7/12/90, is currently under review as part of the fire management plan. Format modification may be required. The park is currently working under this signed document.

The approved *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan for the Santa Fe National Historic Trail* will impact the park, because Bent's Old Fort is on the "Mountain Branch." Liaison with the National Park Service Southwest Regional Office's Chief, Branch of Trails Program for the Colorado segments of the trail is required. While the park and the trail

are separate legislative entities,"...a closely coordinated and mutually beneficial management relationship will be fostered between the...park...and the trail." Basically, the park will assist in furthering the purposes of the trail as stated in the plan.

The legislated boundary still has two parcels (1-106 and 1-130), representing 39 acres, that have not been purchased. The owners have expressed an interest in selling, should National Park Service priorities change and congressional appropriations become available. The objective of purchase is to help preserve the historic scene.

The proposed development of a general management plan will replace the 1975 *Master Plan* and seek to prepare the park for managing the resource into the 21st Century. Issues to address are maintenance or rehabilitation of the historic scene, visitor use facilities and services, visitor resource orientation, integration of Santa Fe Trail interpretation, archeological preservation and presentation, living history versus static museum, direct highway access (U.S. 50) and improved multiple transportation corridor signage (both for the park and the Santa Fe National Historic trail).

A greater data base regarding natural resources at the historic site is needed, in addition to research on the cultural setting. Essentially the entire resource has been modified since Bent's time and will be difficult to restore. The park is in the process of writing a comprehensive resource management plan to address a wide variety of issues such as prairie rehabilitation, park livestock grazing, agricultural leases, water quality, air quality, prairie dog management, remote sensing, and integrated cultural resource issues.

Revision of the interpretive plan is needed for a couple of reasons. The original plan essentially treated the reconstructed fort as a static museum exhibit, however, interpretive evolution at the site has created an innovative and highly successful living history program. While personnel intensive, the program is supported and maintained by soliciting and encouraging a cadre of re-enactors who meet park standards of historiography, accuracy and historic integrity. The transition from museum to living history is further enhanced for the visitor by creating a hands-on environment; replacement of antiques with reproductions encourages a direct visitor resource interface. This interpretive shift and passage of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail legislation (the Mountain Branch coming right to the door of the fort) requires a fresh look at interpretive services and media. The *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan for the SFNHT* suggests visitor facilities necessary to illustrate the significance of Mountain Branch through time. A separate interpretive plan for the SFNHT will be written; integration with the fort site itself is absolutely essential. This is emphasized by a "draft" statement proposed for the plan:

"Bent's Old Fort was a principal trade center on the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail and interpretive subthemes relating to the branch should be presented here. Media and facilities necessary to orient and interpret appropriate subthemes will compliment (*sic*) the historic site's educational emphasis and approach. Specific media prescriptions and visitor facilities will be developed through the site's planning process and in concert with this plan."



Visitor orientation at the site is inadequate; further, thematic development of Bent, St. Vrain and Company relationship and impact on Southern Plains Indian tribes is poorly represented or developed. Illustration of the artifactual (real) remains of the site is impossible at present.

Visitor use statistics are documented with greater accuracy since institution of the fee collection system in 1987. However, no recent survey has been done to verify the analysis and data currently used. To this end, a general user survey is planned for late summer 1990.

Some congressional interest in placing a permanent "Indian Village" at the site was expressed in 1990. The park researched the concept. While supportive of illustrating American Indian sociotechnological and economical impacts relative to the Bent, St. Vrain and Company trading empire, it is appropriate that it be interpreted within the historic context of the site. Seasonal association with the site would be quite varied. To this end, a representative camp will be used in 1990, as part of a special interpretive program, the Fur Trade Encampment. A separate program, Indian Encampment, will be offered in June of 1991. Volunteers will be selected to portray Southern Plains life in keeping with the period, the site and historic documentation for such camps. The role and relationship of the Plains tribes is an important part of William Bent's contribution to the trading company and to westward expansion.

Development and implementation of a maintenance management system modification for a small park operation is a high priority for the site and the regional office in FY 91. Management would make the site a prototype for parks of smaller size.

## **RESOURCES**

### **History**

The national significance of the site and the heritage it represents is the reason for preserving Bent's Old Fort as a reconstructed resource.

Originally built in 1832-1833 as the mountain-plains extension of St. Louis-based American commerce and fur trade into the southwest, Bent's Old Fort was, for 15 years, the frontier hub from which American trade and influence radiated south into Mexico, west into the great Basin Country (and beyond to the Pacific), and north to southern Wyoming. Bent's Old Fort, until abandoned in 1849, was the most important commercial port-of-call and depot between Independence, Missouri, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the mountain route of the Santa Fe Trail. The fort was the major operational base for American traders and trappers in the southern and central plains and mountains of the west.

This historic site was also the southwestern outpost of American cultural penetration and influence; and it was the principal contact point between the white citizens and government and the South Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Northern Apache, Kiowa, and

Comanche Indians.

American military activity was first extended into the southwest to protect the Santa Fe trade and overland trail travel. Bent's Old Fort often served as the southwestern center of such Army operations and was the stronghold of American expansion into what is now the southwestern quarter of the continental United States.

To help staff convey the history of the site, a fine collection of primary and secondary source volumes are available in the park library, specializing in fur trade era, Plains Indians, the Mexican War and the Santa Fe Trail. Historiography and continued research are absolutely essential to insure interpretive program integrity.

### **Archeological Sites and Collections**

The principal remains and evidence of the site are the result of extensive archeological work done between 1953 and 1976 (Herbert Dick, Jackson W. Moore, Jr., Robert W. Leonard, Jr., R.K. Nickel, and Douglas Comer). The artifactual collections are housed at two separate locations: Bent's Old Fort NHS, approximately 180,000 objects and the Midwest Archeological Center, approximately 60,686. Cataloging of the park collection is an on-going project, which is complete for objects housed at the Midwest Archeological Center. Ultimately for purposes of research, it would be appropriate to house the entire collection at the site; however, storage capability is insufficient at present. The collection is not used to illustrate to visitors direct knowledge of the site through up-to-date interpretive exhibits and media. This condition is the result of limited space or because such illustration would be incompatible with the living history format.

Two archeological sites have been identified south of the Arkansas River. Future testing and remote sensing to locate remnants of the Santa Fe Trail is a substantive need. The archeological objects represent a significant collection of artifacts that are important in understanding fur trade in the United States, the tribes of the Southern Plains, commerce on the Mountain Branch, and westward expansion. The park-housed collection is kept in the office area within the reconstructed fort.

### **Historic Sites**

Several Daughters of the American Revolution monuments, marking the Santa Fe Trail or the fort site, are situated at the "stone arch," a gateway to the site built in 1930. The arch was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, October 15, 1966 (LCS, HS-3). These markers are significant to the administrative history of the site, but variations in inscribed dates are confusing to the park visitor. No interpretation of this public historic preservation effort is provided.

The cemetery (HS-2), adjacent to the reconstructed fort, has one visible grave that dates to 1865, in the Barlow-Sanderson Stagecoach period (1861-1881), which is outside of the period depicted at the fort (1846). Twelve other burials are suggested by surface investigations only. Interpretation of the site is not significant at this time.



## **Reconstructed Fort**

Bent's Old Fort is a replica of the original, relying on primary source documentation and archeological reports specific to the site. The 36 reconstructed rooms serve, in effect, as a stage for the interpretation of the history of the Bent, St. Vrain and Company. Original fabric of the structure that remains consists of a section of foundation wall (AV room), kitchen hearth stones (reset), and a partially excavated, below ground level, room off the well room (ice house). The fort is identified as HS-9 on the List of Classified Structures. The fort was reconstructed between May 27, 1975, and June 10, 1976, and dedicated on July 25, 1976. The appropriated cost of reconstruction was \$2.3 million.

"The reconstructed fort is considered to be an interpretive structure and not historic. The major historic preservation concerns...have been and continue to be, the preservation of the historic scene and the archeological resources at the site." (Rocky Mountain Regional Office and State Historic Preservation Offices.)

A considerable investment of time and experimentation has gone into maintaining the reconstructed fort. During the last year, a report was drafted to document the maintenance effort. A second document (a historic structure preservation guide), is being prepared to identify successful and known repair methods. A 10-to-15-year, phased rehabilitation of the structure will be required. It is important to note that the most serious problem, roof leaks extending into vertical walls, has been arrested. Other cyclic work, such as wood replacement, will have to be scheduled.

As a reconstructed resource, Bent's Old Fort NHS has everything to gain from maintaining the highest standards of authenticity and historical integrity and everything to lose from allowing the credibility of the program to be damaged. Maintenance and rehabilitation of the structure should therefore be carried out in a manner similar to that for a historic building.

## **Fort Furnishings**

At the time of the reconstruction, the fort was furnished with both original and replica artifacts and furnishings. Protection of objects was difficult and visitor accessibility was varied. In an effort to remedy the situation, a management action to replace all original pieces with replicas was undertaken. Transferring and relocating original pieces to other museums or parks and furnishing the fort with authentic reproductions has greatly improved the visitor experience. In many instances, research has provided the means to upgrade the site's representation of the year 1846. The site is now able to characterize changes in rooms over the course of the year, making the impression less static and more consistent with history.

The collection of items is significant and is comprised of 391 antiques and 3,200 reproductions.

## Natural Resources

**Water Resources.** A historic natural resource that is in place, but changed, is the Arkansas River. The reconstructed fort is in its floodplain. Seventy miles upstream is Pueblo Dam and Reservoir, which was built in the late 1960s. The reservoir was designed to provide water storage and flood management. Below the dam, between the fort and the dam, are three major contributors to the Arkansas River system. Historically, Fountain Creek is the most likely to contribute to flood conditions, while the other two potential contributors are Huerfano Creek and the Apishapa River. The most significant recorded floods occurred in 1921 (100-year flood) and 1965 (50-year flood).

A secondary issue to the modified stream and its flood potential is failure of Pueblo Dam. While unlikely, the leading edge of such an incident would reach the fort in 17.5 hours, would crest in 22 hours, and would involve most of the site.

The site probably has a lowered risk of spring flooding, but is still threatened by flash floods, like it was historically.

No concerted effort has been made to determine the condition of the water resource. While some data exists with other agencies, no monitoring or analysis of data has been made to determine what changes are occurring. Certainly, agricultural waste water and municipal effluent are factors that contribute to the status.

**Vegetation.** The flooding in 1921 and 1965 modified the riparian habitat by introducing the exotic shrub tamarisk, which continues to be an annual maintenance problem. In addition, native cottonwood stands are in greater abundance than were reported in historic times. In this case, however, the trees are used as a buffer to screen the fort from U.S. Highway 50, and the Atchison Topeka and the Santa Fe Railroad, south of the Arkansas River.

Prior to the establishment and preservation of the historic site, much of the 799 acres was under cultivation. Only since reconstruction has there been a concerted effort to re-establish the short grass prairie. All of this work has been done north of the Arkansas River. Continued efforts in research, integrated pest management, prescribed burns and re-seeding, are needed to stimulate prairie grasses.

Some correlation of historic documentation of plant species has been done to determine environmental impact. Further laboratory work with archeological remains may help to preserve and cultivate a more accurate setting. Of further assistance would be to establish a comprehensive herbarium collection, to be used as an interpretive tool and for monitoring environmental changes. *The Vegetation/Grazing Plan*, 1982, is a good foundation from which to refine and improve our management actions.

**Wildlife and Fish.** A wide variety of wildlife makes their home within, or pass through the area. However, with the exception of the final environmental assessment for the 1975 *Master Plan*, very little has been done to monitor, verify or refine park listings. Very little



is known about the aquatic environs. Again, the only reference is the environmental assessment previously mentioned.

**Minerals/Gas/Oil.** Nine parcels of land within the historic site are still encumbered. Even though development or activity in the region and on adjacent property is nonexistent, it is still an issue in the park's *Land Protection Plan*.

## **Interpretation**

The interpretation of the fort, its historic inhabitants and the practice of trade/commerce between nations and between cultures is the primary focus of the park, regarding the visitor experience. This is accomplished through "third person" interpreters dressed in period clothing. Through this living history approach, management attempts to make relevant the daily lives of people who ventured to Bent's Fort to make war, peace or profit.

Using this living history approach is a time-consuming and thoughtful process that requires constant scrutiny. The park should make every effort, therefore, to maintain the highest levels of authenticity in historic clothing, replica items of material culture, building rehabilitation and maintenance, special interpretive programs and volunteer support activities. The atmosphere, impression and experience for the park visitor must have a firm base in solid historical research.

## **LAND USES AND TRENDS**

All lands within the legislative boundary for the historic site are in national park ownership, with the exception 39.37 acres. There are presently no funds available for purchase of this land, even though there is a "willing seller." The parcel remains a top priority in the park's *Land Protection Plan*. The landowner remains "free to sell" to whomever they wish. The concern over this parcel is the viewshed and feedlot operation (not in service at this time).

Current land use, surrounding the site, is agricultural with the exception of highways and the railroad. No land use near the fort conflicts with the park purpose, although the potential for future commercial development and mineral withdrawal exists.

All water rights for wells have been secured. One site on the south side of the Arkansas River has been developed for park livestock within the last year.

Two tracts of land within the park are used for agricultural production under special use permits. One 15-acre parcel is north of Colorado Highway 149, and is assessed annually. Because of the size and proximity with park neighbors, this use is appropriate at this time. Should the other parcel north of the highway be purchased, this special use permit will be reassessed for prairie rehabilitation. The second agricultural permit supplies the park with 12 tons of alfalfa on an annual basis for livestock use. The livestock in use at the park is much diminished from the past; therefore the benefit to the park should be assessed prior to reissuing this permit. The livestock plan, now in draft, will help to establish park viewsheds or feed needs.



Water rights purchased by front range cities do not seem to pose threats to agricultural lands adjacent to the fort. Fort Lyon Canal water, which serves the fort lands as well as park neighbors, seems to be holding fast, thus reassuring the agricultural community.

Train traffic on the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railway has been modified to serve the Quality Service Network ("Q" Trains) for freight delivery and fast through-traffic train modules (containers and piggyback trailers) to specified destinations. Cottonwood screening softens noise, although frequency of traffic may be an issue.

## **VISITOR USE ANALYSIS**

The principal visitor activity is viewing the reconstructed fort, the associated events and people associated with the trading post and its role in opening the west. This is accomplished through the park brochure, 20-minute video and self-guided visit or a guided tour.

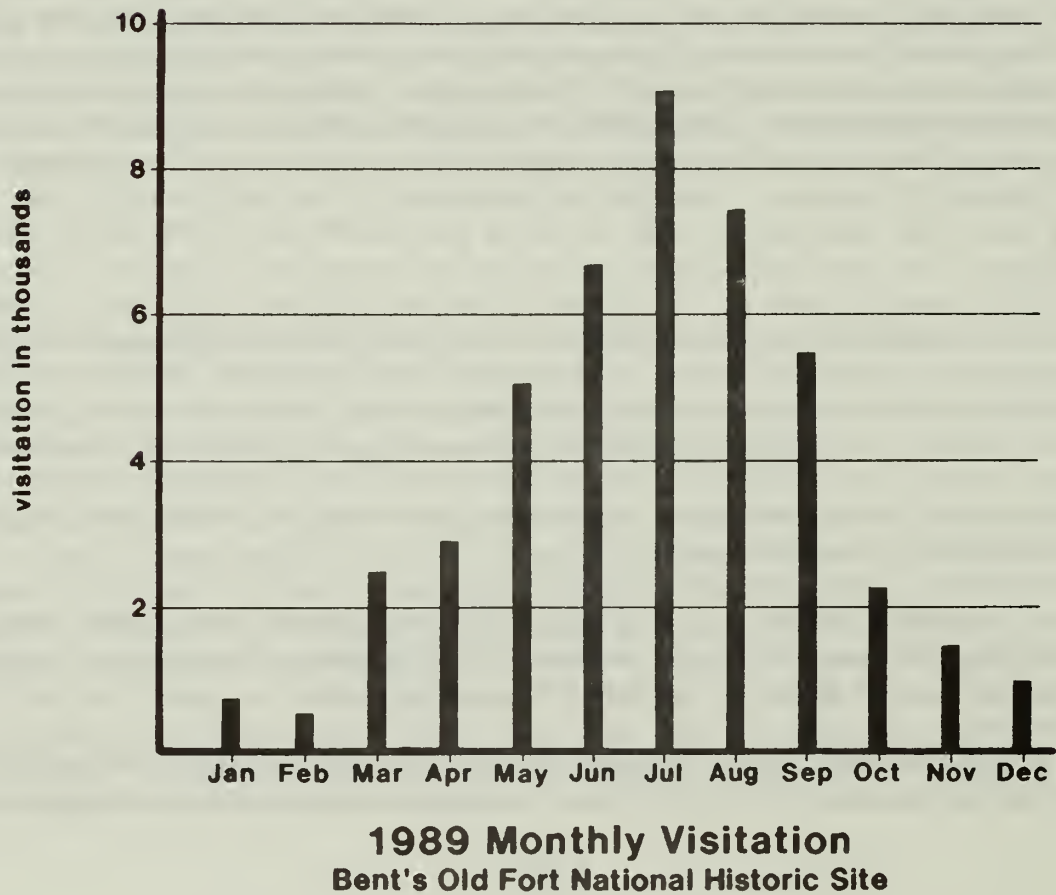
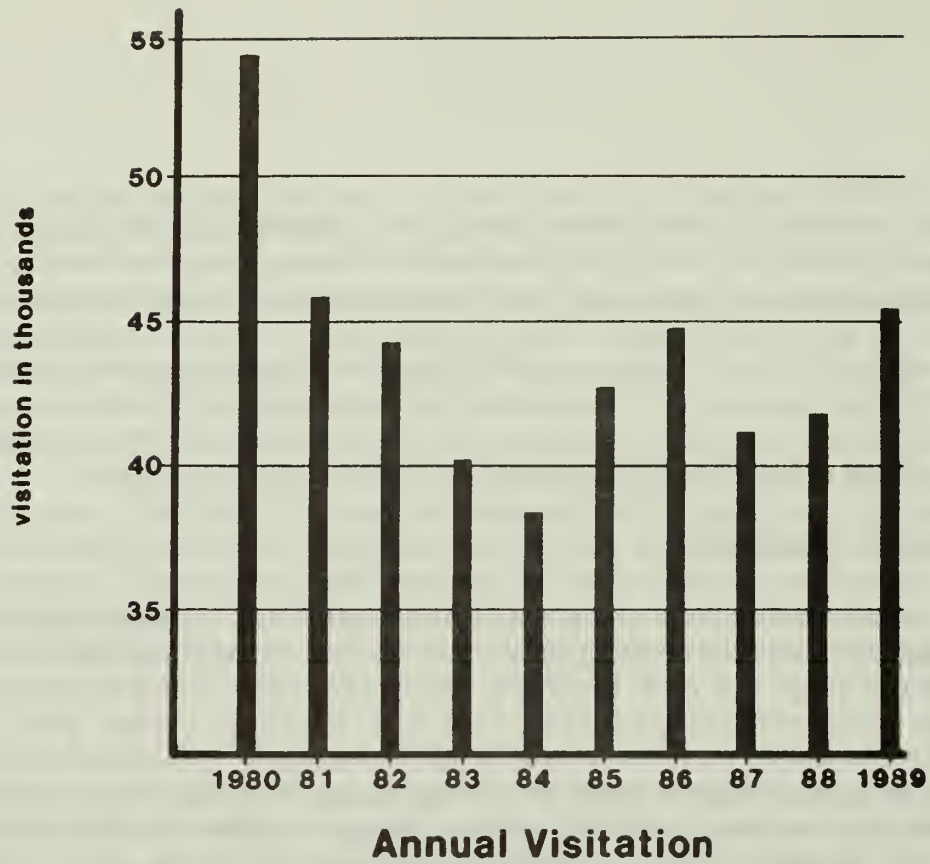
Essentially, substantial visitation to the site started during and after reconstruction in 1975. Visitation was rather erratic until 1981, when a plateau resulted in a ten year average of 43,937. Earlier counts used a pneumatic counter with a multiplier of 3.3. Since 1981, visitation has been based on an actual visitor count.

The majority of site visits occurs from May through September -75 percent; the shoulder seasons of spring and fall have respectively 10 and 8 percent; winter captures only 7 percent. The peak month of July seems to have leveled out at 9,000 and the shoulder seasons appear to be increasing. This seems to be consistent with national trends. Peak visitor days over the course of the year are Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. This may be slightly adjusted by the fact that the park has a special program to encourage school groups. But clearly, Fridays and weekends are peak days. The average length of stay is about 75 minutes. Average daily visitation for the peak month of July is 292 persons and 1,537 visitors per week, or 6,776 per month, during the peak season (5 months).

The majority, 62 percent, is through-traffic and 38 percent are home-based day-users. The breakdown by point of origin is 14 percent local residents, 39 percent regional residents, 45 percent national and 2 percent international. Major contributing states are Colorado, Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri. Age groups represented are children, 23 percent, teenagers, 11 percent, 53 percent adults, and 13 percent senior citizens. Families make up 50 percent of site visits, with couples and organized groups (schools and scouts) taking 19 percent each.

Visitors to the park are offered guided tours; 26 percent usually participate. The audio-visual program "Castle on the Plains" is viewed by 38 percent of the visitors. Interpretive demonstrations reach about 21 percent of the visiting public.

Special interpretive programs (7-9 a year), are held at the park to focus on specific areas of historical significance, to highlight the contributions of a wide variety of racial groups,



to stimulate park visitation and to stimulate living history volunteer excellence and park participation. The present seasonal staffing situation allows little flexibility, restricts research, off-site presentations, report writing and limits involvement with professional activities.

Today, Bent's Old Fort is within an easy half-day drive of most front range communities with populations in excess of 750,000 people. Certainly, interest in the Santa Fe National Historic Trail, direct access from U.S. Highway 50, upgrading the designation of U.S. 50 to a primary route and improved signing will expand visitation. It certainly should be noted that other population centers such as Santa Fe, New Mexico, Amarillo, Texas, and Wichita, Kansas, are target markets for Colorado and, in particular, the southeast Colorado Tourism Region. Bent's Old Fort continues to be an active participant and focus for this part of Colorado.

## **FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT ANALYSIS**

### **Nonhistoric Roads and Trails**

All roads and trails within Bent's Old Fort National Historic site are nonhistoric. However, the fort does maintain 0.4 of a mile of primary roads and a 64-space parking lot, plus 0.6 of a mile of secondary roads, and 0.25 of a mile of primary trail. All roads and trails are maintained on either a preventive or cyclic schedule.

### **Nonhistoric Buildings**

The fort has two nonhistoric buildings; a contact station, approximately 450 square feet, and the maintenance building, approximately 4,000 square feet. The visitor contact station does not adequately serve the orientation needs for the site or for the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. A small, ten table, picnic area with a water fountain is provided for the visitor. This facility should be redesigned to meet individual family and group picnic needs.

### **Utility Systems**

Electricity is purchased from Southeast Colorado Power Association and potable water is purchased from Bent's Old Fort Water Company. The fort maintains its own well system for fire-fighting purposes and other nonpotable uses. This system has no storage capability and the waterline and pumps should be renovated to improve delivery pressure. Telephone service is provided by Mountain Bell. Inter-park phone service between the contact station and fort for emergency and disabled shuttle service is inadequate. The park owns a two-way radio system consisting of a base station located in the maintenance building, with a remote unit in the fort building, and three portable units. The radio system link with the Otero County Sheriff is needed to maximize backup and support services between the park and that agency. An automated fire and security alarm system provides protection services for the fort, when personnel are not present. No such system is in



place for the maintenance shop or contact station.

The park sewage is handled by septic tanks and leach fields, one system for the shop and one for the fort. Both are considered adequate. Solid refuse is hauled by park personnel to a county compactor. The trash in the compactor is removed by county personnel to an approved landfill in Otero County.

## **Historic Structures**

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site has three items on the List of Classified Structures: the reconstructed fort site (HS-9), Old Entrance Arch (HS-3), and cemetery (HS-2).

Bent's Old Fort has been reconstructed as accurately as possible to its appearance in 1845-46. Two rooms within the fort are used by the Bent's Old Fort Historical Association for a bookstore and trade room (period goods for sale). An adjoining room is used for audio-visual visitor services. Except for the trader room, these twentieth century intrusions detract from the visitor experience. The Old Entrance Arch is a stone arch built by the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1930. Currently, traffic does not enter through the arch. The cemetery site contains 13 known graves. the perimeter is marked by stones.

Adaptive use of a portion of the fort for park administration detracts from visitor use of the fort. Museum facilities are currently housed in the same area within the floodplain. Also, the separation from the maintenance building serves to make park operations less efficient.

During the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, an excavation revealed a portion of a subterranean room. Further information about this feature and continuing historic research are lacking. A cooperative education position has been designated as the park historian. It is currently vacant.

## **Major Equipment**

The fort leases a 3/4-ton Dodge pickup and 8 passenger Dodge vans from the GSA Motor Pool in Denver, Colorado. The fort owns and maintains a 1984, Dodge Rampage pickup, which will be replaced by a GSA vehicle, when it is fully amortized. A 1989 John Deere tractor with loader and backhoe and four electric vehicles: a utility truck and three eight-passenger people-movers for the disabled. The vehicles and tractor are maintained by park personnel and funded out of annual appropriations or GSA, as appropriate. The facilities and equipment are adequate for the park's present mission, with two exceptions: the park needs more storage space for equipment and materials.

## STATUS OF PLANNING

Name of Plan/Study	Preparer	Date Approved	Comment on Adequacy	Repository
EA for Master Plan	DSC	2/25/75	Out-of-date	BEOL/RMR
Master Plan/IP/DCP	BEOL/RMR/DSC	10/75	To be replaced by GMP	RMR/BEOL
Cultural Resource Management Plan	RMR/BEOL	2/85	RMP under revision	BEOL/RMR
Archeological Reports I and II	DSC	1981	Current	BEOL/DSC/ETC
Historic Structures Reports I and II	DSC	1975	Current	BEOL/RMR
Historical Furnishing Plan	DSC/RMR	1974	Current	BEOL
Vegetative Management Plan	RMR/BEOL	1982	Outdated	BEOL
Resource Management Plan	BEOL/RMR	1965	Under revision	N/A
Statement for Interpretation	BEOL	5/90	Current	BEOL
Collections Management Plan	BEOL	11/88	Current	BEOL/RMR
Fire Management Plan	BEOL	Under review	Current 1990	BEOL
Floodplain Study	US Army COE	1968	Current	BEOL
Maintenance History and Guide	RMR	Under contract	In process	N/A
Land Protection Plan	BEOL	1989	Current	BEOL

## EXISTING MANAGEMENT ZONING

Most of the 739.37 acres within the boundary of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site are managed as a Historic Zone. There is also a Development Zone an Agricultural Zone and a Special Use Zone. The Development Zone consists of the Colorado State Highway corridor; the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad corridor; and the park access road with parking and maintenance area. The Development Zone contains 2.2 acres (.27 percent). The Special Use Zone consists of all lands north of State Highway 194, including a parcel of privately owned land. This private land is used for cultivated and forage crops, a small cattle feedlot, and farmstead. The remaining land north of State Highway 194 is under a special use permit for agricultural purposes only. The parcel of Agricultural Zone south of State Highway 194 is used by special use permit by the park to raise feed for park livestock. The Agricultural Zone contains 97.5 acres of land (12 percent).

## MAJOR ISSUES

### ADJACENT LANDS/EXTERNAL THREATS

Local groups still support and encourage direct access to the site from U.S. Highway 50. Obvious benefits would be reduced traffic on Colorado 194 and increased visitation to the site. County commissioners, for both Otero and Baca counties, expressed an interest in reactivating a county road river-crossing, either east or west of the fort (C.R.32 or C. R. 36).

On a national level, there has been discussion about making U.S. 50 an interstate. However, a feasibility study is far from here. Should an upgrade be proposed, a park access opportunity might present itself. In any case, revision of the park's *Master Plan*





# **EXISTING MANAGEMENT ZONING** **BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE** OTERO COUNTY COLORADO UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

is scheduled to start in the fall of 1990 and will consider this issue and realistic alternatives.

The United States Air Force, Strategic Training Range, Detachment 1, 1st Electronic Evaluation Group, locally known as the "Bomb Plot," is still active; celebrating 30 years as an electronic combat range. The approach for their target southeast of La Junta brings overflights parallel and south of the Arkansas River at Bent's Old Fort. Both B-52 and B1-B flights are common; some within 2 miles of the fort. Visual and audio intrusion on the setting is common and of short duration. Flight patterns were changed in 1989, which has improved the situation; prior use brought flights closer to, and at times, directly over the fort. A cooperative atmosphere does exist between the historic site and the combat range.

The Farmers Home Administration has taken back 405.5 acres because of default on a loan. The parcel has a common boundary with the historic site on the east side, south of the Arkansas River to the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railroad ROW. The property is not in the park's *Land Protection Plan* and therefore is not considered for inclusion by the NPS. However, FHA is considering a transfer of "OX BOW" property to the Colorado Division of Wildlife as a management unit. The unit would be managed principally for upland game birds. Should the property be transferred, the historic site would have concerns regarding hunting and visitor conflict, fire management, site signing, trespass, and conflict with special interpretive programs. On the other hand, the property transfer could create more direct cooperation between the agencies, increase official presence south of the Arkansas, increase period black powder events as a cooperative effort in support of the Fur Trade Encampment, and increase research/resource sharing on habitat rehabilitation (cultivated lands).

The Thatcher Dome Project is a plan for a radioactive waste dump 44 miles southeast of La Junta. While currently shelved, it does present a concern in this part of the state regarding economic development and tourism. It would be difficult at present, however, to determine impacts to the historic site, if any.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been asked by the Colorado Highway Department to assist with some riverbank stabilization parallel with Colorado 194, at the northeast corner of the historic site's boundary. The proposal is to use dumped rock groins (9) on the north bank to force the flow on to the south side. Preliminary drawings show the westernmost groin on park property; however, a survey will have to be conducted to determine the exact boundary. Project groins will have slope to vegetate and will not be within the fort's viewshed. Flooding in the past four years has caused closure of the road in the proposed project area. This is a significant issue for visitation and access to the site, since Colorado 194 is the primary transportation corridor.

The waste water ditch for the Fort Lyon Canal Company parallels the south side of Colorado 194, across the entrance of the site and is in highway right-of-way. This unlined ditch contributes to surface and ground water, which appears to be modifying vegetation east of the picnic area. The tail end of this ditch crosses park property perpendicular to Colorado 194 in the northeast corner of the park. The banks of the Arkansas River are

eroding northward along this ditch line. Engineering assistance and 106 compliance will be necessary to reduce the environmental effects of this waste water ditch, both on and off park property.

## **PLANNING**

A general management plan/interpretive prospectus/development concept plan/environment assessment is needed to provide direction for long-range management, development, and use of the historic site.

Direct access to the site from U.S. Highway 50 needs to be determined as part of the GMP process.

The contract for the fort's historic structure preservation guide needs to be finalized.

A baseline data inventory for natural resources needs to be developed and integrated with the cultural resource management plan, to insure a comprehensive resource management plan.

Design compatibility and continuity for supporting facilities needs to be established, so that the site gives an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

A concession, marketing and feasibility study is needed, and may be an outgrowth of the GMP process.

A complete administrative history for the historic site is needed. An update of the work written by the Colorado Historical Society would be excellent.

A livestock plan to establish the livestock needs based on what Bent had, is required.

## **ARTIFACTS**

Cataloging of the archeological objects in the museum collection needs to be finished.

Museum storage needs to be improved and provisions made for visitor accessibility through interpretive exhibits.

All archeological collections should be returned to the site for interpretation and research purposes.

## **VISITOR USE**

Visitor use and orientation facilities should be modified to better serve the site and



responsibilities for the Santa Fe National Historic Trail.

Antiques need to be replaced with reproductions, to avoid damage, to allow for greater interpretive flexibility and to provide a hands-on experience for the park visitors.

A comfort station is needed for the visitor parking/picnic area and should be addressed in the GMP process.

## **OPERATIONS**

Utilities, maintenance storage and administrative facilities need improvement.

A land use policy for agricultural leases that is consistent with the park mission and park livestock needs should be developed.

Private land should be purchased to eliminate the visual intrusion and to prevent the possibility of rezoning for commercial use.

The historian position in the park needs to be filled.

## **FACILITIES**

The reconstructed fort needs to be stabilized and rehabilitated through implementation of the Historic Structures Preservation Guide.

Signage on all major corridors in southeastern Colorado needs to be improved and linked with the Santa Fe National Historic Trail, via the use of its logo.

The waste water ditch that crosses the front of the park along Colorado Route 194 should be lined to reduce groundwater alteration of the river bottom.

The administrative office, bookstore and AV room should be moved to further enhance the visitor experience by removing twentieth century intrusions.

## **THE SANTA FE TRAIL**

Remote sensing needs to be applied to the site and adjacent lands to verify the location of the Santa Fe Trail.

The SFNHT Interpretive Plan should be integrated with the historic site's proposed revision.

## **MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

- To recreate, in as far as is possible, through research and historiography, a historic atmosphere and environment of Bent's Fort, an operating trading post, in 1846, on the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail; thereby providing the visitor with an experience and opportunity for understanding its importance in place and time.
- To create a management framework, actions and operations that will assure resources (cultural and natural) will be in place and accessible in perpetuity for future generations; thereby minimizing, is so far as is practical, the physical and aesthetic impact upon the site resulting from 20th century man, his activities, and his contrivances (sight, sound, smell).
- To provide the richest possible interpretive program for visitors (in personal services and media), assuring the highest standards of presentation and authenticity in terms of representing the period; focusing on historical professional integrity and research as a basis for the program.
- To maximize the visitor experience for all and maximize the number of opportunities for enjoyment of the historic site, within the constraints of legislation, resource protection and funding.



# APPENDIX A

PUBLIC LAW 86-487 JUNE 3, 1960

74 STAT. 155

## Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

Establishment authorized-----Act of June 3, 1960 Page  
344

An Act Authorizing the establishment of a national historic site at Bent's Old Fort, near La Junta, Colorado, approved June 3, 1960 (74 Stat. 155)

Bent's Old  
Fort National  
Historic Site.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That the Secretary of the Interior shall acquire on behalf of the United States, by gift, purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, such lands, interests therein and improvements thereon, as the Secretary may deem necessary for the purpose of establishing a national historic site at the site of Bent's Old Fort on the Old Santa Fe Trail, located in Otero County, Colorado, approximately seven miles east of La Junta, north of the Arkansas River.

39 Stat. 535.  
16 U.S.C. 1 *et*  
*seq.*  
49 Stat. 666.  
16 U.S.C. 461-  
467.

SEC. 2. (a) The property acquired under the provisions of the first section of this Act shall be designated as the Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site and shall be set aside as a public national memorial to commemorate the historic role played by such fort in the opening of the West. The National Park Service, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, shall administer, protect, and develop such monument, subject to the provisions of the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916, as amended and supplemented, and the Act entitled "An Act to provide for the preservation of historic American sites, buildings, objects, and antiquities of national significance, and for other purposes", approved August 21, 1935, as amended.

(b) In order to provide for the proper development and maintenance of such national historic site, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to construct and maintain therein such markers, buildings, and other improvements, and such facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors, as he may deem necessary.

Appropriation.

SEC. 3. There are hereby authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act. (See 16 U.S.C. § 461 note [Supp. II].)

## 5. Bent's Old Fort

An Act to authorize additional appropriations for the acquisition of lands and interests in lands within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in Idaho. (92 Stat. 3487) (P.L. 95-625)

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

## TITLE III—BOUNDARY CHANGES

SEC. 301. The boundaries of the following units of the National Park System are revised as follows, and there are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary, but not exceed the amounts specified in the following paragraphs for acquisitions of lands and interests in lands within areas added by reason of such revisions:

\* \* \* \* \*

(1) Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado: To add approximately six hundred and twenty-two acres as generally depicted on the map entitled "Boundary Map, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado", numbered 417-80,007-A, and dated June 1976: \$842,000.

SEC. 302. Within twelve months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register a detailed map or other detailed description of the lands added or excluded from any area pursuant to section 301.

SEC. 303. (a) Within the boundaries of the areas as revised in accordance with section 301, the Secretary is authorized to acquire lands and interests therein by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange, or transfer from any other Federal agency. Lands and interests therein so acquired shall become part of the area to which they are added, and shall be subjected to all laws, rules, and regulations applicable thereto. When acquiring any land pursuant to this title, the Secretary may acquire any such land subject to the retention of a right of use and occupancy for a term not to exceed twenty-five years or for the life of the owner or owners. Lands owned by a State or political subdivision thereof may be acquired only by donation.

(b) (1) Lands and interests therein deleted from any area pursuant to section 301 may be exchanged for non-Federal lands within the revised boundaries of such area, or transferred to the jurisdiction of any other Federal agency or to a State or political subdivision thereof, without monetary consideration, or be administered as public lands by the Secretary, as the Secretary may deem appropriate.

(2) In exercising the authority contained in this section with respect to lands and interests therein deleted from any such area which were acquired from a State, the Secretary may, on behalf of the United States, transfer to such State exclusive or concurrent legislative jurisdiction over such lands, subject to such terms and conditions as he may deem appropriate, to be effective upon acceptance thereof by the State.

(c) It is the established policy of Congress that wilderness, wildlife conservation, and park and recreation values of real property owned by the United States be conserved, enhanced, and developed. It is further declared to be the policy of Congress that unutilized, underutilized, or excess Federal real property be timely studied as to suitability for wilderness, wildlife conservation, or park and recreation purposes. To implement this policy, the Secretary, the Administrator of General Services, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall establish a system with appropriate procedures to permit the Secretary full and early opportunity to make such studies and propose appropriate recommendations to disposing agencies for consideration in connection with determinations of further utilization or disposal of such property under existing law. Each affected executive agency is authorized and directed to provide to the Secretary such advice and information relating to such studies as the Secretary may request.

SEC. 304. The authorities in this title are supplementary to any other authorities available to the Secretary with respect to the acquisition, development, and administration of the areas referred to in section 301.

\* \* \* \* \*

Approved November 10, 1978.

101 STAT. 302

PUBLIC LAW 100-35—May 8, 1987

Public Law 100-35  
100th Congress

## An Act

May 8, 1987  
[H.R. 240]

To amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Santa Fe Trail as a National Historic Trail.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

## SECTION 1. DESIGNATION.

(a) DESIGNATION.—Section 5(a) of the National Trails System Act (16 U.S.C. 1244(a)) is amended by adding the following new paragraph at the end thereof:

“(15) The Santa Fe National Historic Trail, a trail of approximately 950 miles from a point near Old Franklin, Missouri, through Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado to Santa Fe, New Mexico, as generally depicted on a map entitled ‘The Santa Fe Trail’ contained in the Final Report of the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, dated July 1976. The map shall be on file and available for public inspection in the office of the Director of the National Park Service, Washington, District of Columbia. The trail shall be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. No lands or interests therein outside the exterior boundaries of any federally administered area may be acquired by the Federal Government for the Santa Fe Trail except with the consent of the owner thereof. Before acquiring any easement or entering into any cooperative agreement with a private landowner with respect to the trail, the Secretary shall notify the landowner of the potential liability, if any, for injury to the public resulting from physical conditions which may be on the landowner’s land. The United States shall not be held liable by reason of such notice or failure to provide such notice to the landowner. So that significant route segments and sites recognized as associated with the Santa Fe Trail may be distinguished by suitable markers, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to accept the donation of suitable markers for placement at appropriate locations.”.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 10(c)(2) of such Act (16 U.S.C. 1249(c)(2)) is amended by inserting “and (15)” after “(13)”.

Approved May 8, 1987.

Missouri.  
Kansas.  
Oklahoma.  
Colorado.  
New Mexico.  
Public  
information.  
Gifts and  
property.

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 240:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 100-16 (Comm. on Interior and Insular Affairs).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 100-39 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 133 (1987):

Mar. 10, considered and passed House.

Apr. 12, considered and passed Senate.









